dotSearch



13 shortcuts for a content strategy that works

& 23 free tools that make it *easy*

YOU'RE LATE. BUT IT'S OK!

For many companies, having a content strategy is their online marketing strategy. Without a steady supply of good content, you've nothing to say to engage with your social networks. Without social engagement, you're not part of conversations that are already happening. You could be missing an opportunity to be a valuable part of your target market's community (or to create a community of your own), an opportunity your competitors may be sweeping up.

For search, Google is moving evermore toward a 'democratised', human-style appraisal system when deciding how to rank web pages. This means that social signals like tweets, for example, are *already* influencing your rankings on search engines, and are likely to have an even greater influence on search rankings in the future.

Google's investment in this system surpasses 99% of companies' marketing budgets. This means that the success of an online marketing and search marketing strategy increasingly depends on the creation of compelling, shareable topical and relevant content, disseminated in the right places, at the right time.

WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY CONTENT?

- ✓ Anything attractive enough to get you traffic
- ✓ Apps
- ✓ Blogs
- ✓ Comments on blogs & forums
- ✓ Conversations on social media
- ✓ Games
- ✓ Images
- ✓ Infographics
- ✓ Newsletters hosted on your site
- ✓ Presentations
- ✓ Ratings
- ✓ Reviews
- ✓ Tags
- ✓ Video
- ✓ Whitepapers
- ✓ Widgets

START THE CONVERSATION

1. Become a detective

First things first, you need to have a clear insight into what's being discussed and the topics being sought out by your target markets and communities.

Understand your audience's seasonal habits so you can get the right content to them at the right time (i.e. first) – and you'll have a head start for your content planning: winter holidays, for example are more topical in Autumn than Winter. Be ready to start research well in advance of when your audience start searching. It's all about getting there first.

There are several essential tools for tracking trends & insights to ensure your planning is based on fact and to influence your content titles. Make sure you get acquainted with these ones:

- **Google Insights for Search**
  Tells you exactly what people are searching for, when
- **Alexa What's Hot**
  Shows top hot topics and products, updated every five minutes
- **Trendisitc**
  Shows what's trending on twitter right now, recently, and lets you search the last 180 days too
- **NMA Viral Brand Chart**
  Perfect for inspiration
- **PR Newswire**
  Spy on your competitors, and see what's happening in your industry when you use 'headlines search'
- **YouTube Trends Dashboard**
  See YouTube video trends by age, country and gender

2. Be immersed in social

Being part of the same online discussions as your audience means you'll pick up ideas and be signposted to inspiration for your content, learn more about your audience, and raise your professional or brand profile. When you're genuinely interested in your customer and industry, topics flow naturally from conversations.

- **Google Alerts**
  Alert you if your brand or specific keywords(s) are mentioned online –so you can make sure you're a part of the conversation
- **AddThis**
  Widget for your site that lets you add share buttons and measure their usage

START THE CONVERSATION

3. Prioritize topics

Prioritize topics according to business objectives and viability, but primarily demand. For example: email campaign content is easily measurable. By looking at past successes, you'll have a ready list of topics you know work for you.

If you're ecommerce, know your suppliers' product development and launch schedules and what their hot topics are, and be ready to be first to have content about it online: original content is important for search engine visibility– copied content will get you penalised by search engines. Don't miss the boat and let your competitors get the views and shares instead.

- **RSS subscriptions**
  Industry leaders discussing your products or industry will trigger more buzz – subscribing to the relevant blogs by RSS means you can be first to follow up with your own contributions and content. If you don't have Outlook (which can read RSS), you can get RSS readers around the web.

4. Plan it out

Keep your seasonal plan in a spreadsheet and plan the resources for each piece of content. As you know well in advance what topic you're discussing, you can get thinking about it and discussing it internally before you hit pen to paper. This helps you build momentum by ensuring you're full of exciting ideas to get down.

- **Google Calendar**
  Very shareable / portable calendars that can be hosted online for sharing with guest bloggers or freelancers, for example

GETTING ON WITH IT

5. Be brave

You don't have to be correct or authoritative every time you write or create fresh content - just useful or interesting can be enough. Being disagreed with is far better than being invisible because you don't communicate at all. If you make a mistake, you can comment on your own content, and get involved in the conversation – if someone has pointed it out, simply by generating engagement your content has fulfilled half its purpose already.

- **Media Piston**
  Great source of freelance copywriters, for those too scared or busy to DIY

6. Multiply your media

Snippets of different media types being shown in search engine results pages (SERPS) mean that copy alone is not enough to stand out. There is a huge opportunity to use different media types: video, images, photos, tweets and 'rich snippets' to dramatically increase your online visibility, and ultimately traffic to your website.

The reason multimedia works for search engines is that it appeals to humans. Google wants to make results pages more engaging. Creating rich media that relates to your content gives it the best chance of the widest exposure.

Yes, video is more work, but if you want your strategy to work – you have to move with the times. 'Doing' video could be as simple as creating a video blog in your board room on a decent mobile phone or handheld camera and embedding it on your site using YouTube. If it's interesting, topical, controversial, valuable or new, it'll work.

- **ManyEyes**
  Dip your toe into infographics with this tool from IBM
- **Prezi**
  Helps you build killer 'zooming' presentations, pronto
- **Slideshare**
  Great presentation hosting tool with free analytics, presentations hosted on both SlideShare and Prezi can be embedded on your site
- **Widgetbox**
  Create your own widget for use on your or your business partners' sites
- **Schema.org**
  Provides a collection of schemas, i.e., HTML tags, that webmasters can use to mark-up pages in ways recognized by major search providers – for rich media, it can give you a great search engine boost
- **Pummelvision**
  Pummelvision grabs your photos from around the web and edits them into a tight music video

GETTING ON WITH IT

7. Govern well

Put reminders in your calendar to refresh each piece of content whenever you can – Google likes recent content and so do users. So long as the content is still topical, refreshing it is the best way to retain search momentum of a piece. Crucially, it becomes shareable again.

Once you've done a set of research once, your resources are more likely to be in place, making it far easier to update content than start from scratch. And if you take the opportunity to update the content, multiply your media AND make it hyper-targeted by adding a sectorial slant or other customization for each piece of content. You'll reap the benefits and thank us later.

8. Use content to upskill your team

Help your colleagues overcome their fear of writing by incentivising blog writing from all teams in your business. Each will have a current theme or hot topic that they're thinking of, and a blog needn't take long to write. They get the chance to raise their profile online; and you get relevant, fresh content.

Not everyone can write good copy though, so you'll need an Editor-in-chief and a few guidelines. And for all content, include briefings in team meetings so the whole team is up-to-speed with whatever your content focuses on. Resulting discussions will help inspire more content, too.

» **Read It Later**
Helps you bookmark your way around the web, sending articles to your smartphone for reading later. You can read, thus learn far more, share more with your colleagues, and inspire more writing

9. Have a checklist

Not all companies will have the resources for formal editorial guidelines, but it is important to know how you'd like to come across to the outside world – for branding, consistency and because it'll help with writers block!

Use The Conversation Prism as a basis for creating a checklist of social channels to share content on. This will help give your exposure the chance it deserves, and ensure you don't miss channels. All snowballs are born snowflakes, and once your profiles are set up on all relevant channels it could just take a matter of seconds to add a piece of content you've already created. Which could be that particular snowflake...

» **The Conversation Prism**
Gives you a whole view of the social media universe – so you can assess the channels to focus on

GETTING ON WITH IT

10. Facebook is your friend

Facebook's social plugins offer marketers a very exciting set of features. Make sure you add Facebook commenting to your sites. What's fab about this is that readers know they can comment easily when they see a recognizable technology that they trust. Even better, when users post a comment, it'll be shared with their network of like-minded people – encouraging the snowball effect.

» **Facebook Social Plugins**
A host of plugins that help you be more integrated with Facebook to encourage sharing and commenting

11. Don't be invisible!

Optimising your content for search engines (i.e. 'SEOing' it) is important, but it needs to be done with care to ensure keywords don't get in the way of good writing.

Make sure your copywriters are armed with a list of the key terms you're targeting in your SEO, and don't let your media be published without the correct technical set up.

» **SEO Moz Toolbar**
Access SEO metrics as you browse the web

When audiences flock to read the content you've worked so hard on, you want to give yourself the best chance of converting as many as possible.

Check that:

- ✓ you've included the right key terms in your copy, at the right density, and in the right places
- ✓ the right page titles and meta descriptions are used on your pages
- ✓ include video, images and social plug-ins wherever applicable
- ✓ your page template is optimised for conversions with clear call to actions and easy navigation

12. Automate processes and save time

A lot of content is needed in competitive sectors. But you don't have to create it all from scratch. You can set up processes that automatically add your newsletter to your website, or share your blog to your twitter feed for example.

Getting these properly set up can save you plenty of time and ensure things are shared in time, which is vital for social media. Simply adding a twitter widget to your site with a filter on your topic(s) adds new, relevant content to your page that Google will love.

GETTING ON WITH IT

Polyvore and Wikipedia are great examples of how user-generated content can give you incredible search engine weight, without you having to lift a finger. For having users curate their content so regularly, Google rewards them and the effect is self-fulfilling – more visitors mean more content and so on.

- **Lucid Chart**
  Allows you to document processes for free – a freeware version of Microsoft Visio
- **Twitter Widgets**
  Lets you display Twitter updates on your website

13. Ask your friends

Your client base, commercial partners and social networks are great sources of content too. Just putting a line in your newsletter requesting guest bloggers is a start, and why not ask commercial partners if you can use their videos, images and other media?

Make sure you tap all the following resources for content *and* content ideas:

- ✓ Client base
- ✓ Employees
- ✓ Board of directors
- ✓ Outsource options
- ✓ Commercial partners
- ✓ Your personal and professional social networks

Don't get busted for duplicate content. Avoid this by ensuring there is no plagiarised content on your site. You should aim for 90% original content on all pages, or ask your SEO agency to add canonical HTML tags, which point search engines to your preferred page, if you absolutely *must* have the same content on more than one page.

- **Google Webmaster Tools**
  Google's Webmaster Tools will show you duplicate page titles and Meta descriptions on your site so that you can check each for duplicate content

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?



dotSearch
part of the dotDigital Group plc

AMBITIOUS ABOUT ONLINE GROWTH?

Let's talk

dotSearch specialises in helping companies grow dramatically through search marketing. We have been running successful SEO for almost 12 years – since before the inception of Google itself.

Now, as a part of the dotDigital group plc we're able to provide a full suite of digital marketing solutions that have helped build some of the following businesses:

"The revenue and ROI that dotSearch delivers from our search budget is exceptional".

Founder, gettingpersonal.co.uk

We'd love to discuss how we can dramatically ramp up the ROI from your online marketing budget and deliver you far more converting traffic. Speak to one of our friendly search gurus today.

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